

Region 6 Citizens Advisory Council
Jan. 15, 2008
Cottonwood Inn, Glasgow

CAC members present: Bernie Hart, Howard Pippin, John Crohn, Bob Smith, Steve Sukut, Fran Buell, Connie Iversen, Tom Burch, Scott Billingsley, Darlyne Dascher

CAC members absent: Carl Totman, Nick Siebrasse, Dustin Hill, Dennis Idler, Rich Stuker

FWP staff present: Pat Gunderson, Woody Baxter, Bill Wiedenheft, Mike Herman, Andrew McKean, Harold Wentland, Shawn Briggs, Charlie Bridgham, Mike Ruggles

Guests: FWP Commissioner Willie Doll, Dick Iversen

Pat welcomed the group, and provided overview of the agenda and invited CAC members to stay for the evening's Glasgow season-setting meeting

Public Comments: Dick Iversen of Richland County and member of the Private Lane/Public Wildlife Council gave a brief overview of the governor-appointed committee and encouraged CAC members to contact him with issues of access to wildlife.

Dale (missed last name) also addressed the CAC about the importance of working to maintain access to private land. "For the common man, there's less access all the time. At some point you have to draw the line. Maybe someone in the state should be overseeing access."

Tom Burch asked FWP staff how the big-game draw works. He noted that he has heard instances of hunters getting rejected for a first-choice hunting district but their buddies drew that hunting district as a second choice. Some discussion of the draw followed and Pat asked CAC members if they would be interested in hearing more about the mechanics of FWP's drawing process. There was some support for an article in Montana Outdoors demystifying the process with possibly a reprint in the big-game hunting regulations.

Harold Wentland provided an overview of several tentative hunting proposals, including a proposal to move to fixed dates for hunting season openers, the biennial big-game quota setting process, a proposal to initiate a youth pheasant hunting weekend and falconry limits on upland birds. He also introduced discussions of the proposal to change the HD 640 boundary (Bob Smith voiced some concerns with the 3-week season in HD640), and deer and elk tentative regulations, including those that would limit archery elk hunters in the Missouri River Breaks and elsewhere in the state.

Some questions: What is the status of the Carlson Ranch? Why are 622/621/620 districts lumped into a single hunting district? Would breaking up the districts help redistribute hunters in the Breaks? What happens with party applicants when applying for limited archery elk permits? Would they all draw or only a subset of them?

Other comments included that the pace of residents leasing ground for hunting access is accelerating and that some Block Management properties are abused. Some “willy nilly” hunter behavior and areas devoid of game.

Harold continued with overviews of tentative regulations on A9/B12 elk licenses, elk regulations in districts 680 and 690, replacing 900 archery antelope tags with limited-quota permits, mountain lion, wolf and bighorn sheep proposals.

Tom Burch then led a discussion of the status of Fort Peck Hatchery funding issues. He brought the CAC up to speed on discussions over the past few months and presented the group with two alternative frameworks for funding. Proposal 1 is characterized as raising the price of the Warm Water Stamp. Proposal 2 would abolish the stamp and fund the hatchery along with the other state hatcheries with license dollars, which may have to be boosted in order to fund the facility.

Burch: “This is the most frustrating process I’ve ever been involved in” and recommended FWP support proposal 2. Burch urged the CAC to use a consensus process to develop a CAC position on one of the proposals and he led a vigorous discussion of the shortcomings and merits of both proposals.

Steve Sukut made a motion and Scott Billingsley seconded that the Region 6 CAC support Proposal # 2, which would remove legislative language restricting state funding to the Warm Water Stamp and also remove the species restrictions for the facility. The CAC unanimously passed that motion.

Ryan Rauscher gave the CAC an overview of the regional Prairie Dog Implementation Committee’s charge and work so far.

CAC Roundtable

Fran Buell, Gildford - Clarified the Montana Trappers Association’s position on wolf trapping and also gave an overview of the group Footloose Montana, an anti-trapping group that is becoming mobilized to influence trapping regulations. Fran also noted that two bands of antelope have been seen consistently near her house along with increasing numbers of white-tailed deer and sharp-tailed grouse.

Darlyne Dascher, Fort Peck - No report

John Crohn, Dagmar - John encouraged the department to do anything to promote youth hunting opportunities, possibly promoting hunting in Montana’s schools. “Maybe provide a free hunting license for good grades.”

Howard Pippin, Saco - Polled archery hunters in his community and overwhelming support for limiting elk permits in the Breaks. Wide opposition to proposal to have fixed openers.

Bernie Hart, Hinsdale - A couple of access issues to be discussed in another venue.

Tom Burch, Fort Peck - "I'm not a trapper but would like to voice support for trappers. If we don't support our fellow sportsmen we feed into opponents' strategy to divide and conquer us."

Nick Siebrasse, Havre - Provided a letter indicating support for limiting archery elk permits in Breaks and concern for parked rail cars blocking antelope migrations.

Robert Smith, Poplar - Pheasant hunting has been great, fishing not so much. Some grumblings about the continued 3-week hunting season in District 640. More depredation concerns because of lower harvest. Questioned how the age structure of bucks has been influenced by the shortened season.

Steve Sukut, Glasgow - Steve had a long list of constituent issues, including: Support for extended district for youth elk hunters in the Breaks, Question on why sage grouse limit is 3 (corrected to 2) birds when population appears to be low, Concerns from hunters who have perceived "heavy-handedness" of wardens, Questioned the definition of the term "reasonable access" and urged FWP to apply a more rigorous, better understood definition of what this means, Concern with some Block Management cooperators thinking of or actually leaving the program because they are being offered more from leasing hunters, Questioned why 900 antelope permit holders are offered two additional doe/fawn tags in areas where the population is suffering, Proposed a Block Management stamp to help fund the program and reduce reliance on non-resident outfitter sponsored licenses, Proposed limit to the number of bobcats an individual could harvest in any year, Passed on interest from a muzzleloader hunter to create a special blackpowder area in the region, Questioned when FWP will revisit the population objectives detailed in the Elk Management Plan.

Connie Iversen, Culbertson - Lots of pheasants south of the river, fewer grouse. More mule deer moving into traditional whitetail habitat. Is it because of oil activity in the uplands? Hosted some youth hunters, notably a young turkey hunter.

Scott Billingsley, Glasgow - Cited some "blatant disregard" for private land enrolled in Block Management including driving off established roads and inappropriate off-road retrieval with vehicles, Noted petition that's being circulated in Glasgow area requesting a permit mule deer area in District 622. "I'm for anything that increases the quality of the bucks in the area.", Suggested that publicity will increase hunting pressure and force FWP to eventually go to a choose-your-weapon management framework, Questioned why FWP wasn't actively planting pheasants in Milk River where hail had a devastating impact on bird populations, Questioned if FWP was doing any census work on brown and rainbow trout in the Fort Peck Dam tailwater. Worried that low flows could impact ability of fish to spawn, Noted that private land is being leased and bought by a variety of interests, not just outfitters.

Pat discussed the CAC's terms of office. Members whose terms expire in May include Darlyne Dascher, Fran Buell, Dustin Hill, Howard Pippin and Tom Burch. FWP will initiate recruitment drive and have new members (or incumbents reappointed) in the summer with new terms beginning in September.

Next meeting: Discussion of March. FWP will be in contact with members about date. Venue likely to be Fort Peck Hatchery. Topics could include Block Management funding, update on season-setting proposals.